

# Plant Fact Sheet

## MARSH ELDER

*Iva frutescens* L.

Plant Symbol = IVFR

Contributed by: USDA NRCS New Jersey State  
Office & Cape May Plant Materials Center



Robert H. Mohlenbrock  
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### Alternate Names

High-tide bush

### Uses

The marsh elder is normally associated with the mid to high marsh ecosystem, forming the last line of defense for shoreline erosion control. More recently this species has become associated with the lower marsh system by colonizing the dredged material resulting from construction of ditches and ponds for mosquito control.

**Habitat:** During extreme high tides, both small mammals and birds have been reported to use emergent vegetation as island of refuge. The marsh elder would readily serve this purpose. Marsh elder also provides suitable nesting habitats for various

species of birds, like the red-winged blackbird and the marsh wren.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description

Marsh elder is a perennial, deciduous shrub commonly growing between 3-8 feet high. The succulent leaves are egg-shaped to narrowly lance-shaped and oppositely arranged except for the upper reduced leaves. The lower leaves grow 4-6 inches long and 1-2 inches wide. Many greenish-white flower heads are arranged on terminal stems subtended by tiny green, leaf-like appendages. It is often confused with groundsel (*Baccharis halimifolia*) which exhibits succulent, coarsely-toothed leaves alternately arranged on the stem.

### Adaptation and Distribution

The marsh elder naturally grows in the mid to high salt marsh-estuarine area, back dunes, and on muddy sea shores from Massachusetts to Florida and Texas. Here it commonly occurs with groundsel tree to form the salt bush community. These plants usually only occur at elevations where their roots are not subject to prolonged water table flooding, such as the upland border of salt marshes. However, there are occasional exceptions where these associated plants are found at lower elevations associated with drainage ditches and canals.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

### Establishment

Marsh elder is generally established as 1 to 2 year old containerized plants, however 1 year bare root seedlings have been transplanted successfully in the spring. Since this plant has the ability to root from a dormant, unrooted cutting it may have application in soil bioengineering systems for tidal shoreline stabilization.

### Management

No specific management recommended.

**Pests and Potential Problems**

None.

**Environmental Concerns**

None.

**Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

Plants are commercially available from specialized coastal and wetland plant nurseries.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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